



# CREATING FOOD-SAFE SCHOOLS

A HOW-TO GUIDE

**IMPROVE  
STUDENT AND  
STAFF ATTENDANCE**

**PREVENT  
SERIOUS  
FOODBORNE  
ILLNESS**

**REDUCE  
LIABILITY**

**LOWER  
SUBSTITUTE  
COSTS**

**ENHANCE  
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY  
CONFIDENCE IN YOUR  
SCHOOL**



# WHY ATTACK FOODBORNE ILLNESS?

The answer is simple: Because the consequences of **not** preventing foodborne illness are grave. Consider:

- Serious—perhaps even fatal—illness
- Lost learning and teaching time
- Potential liability
- Decreased family and community confidence in your school

Food safety matters. On a typical school day, millions of children eat at their schools, consuming everything from cafeteria meals to snacks to whatever they bought at the school basketball game.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 76 million cases of foodborne illness occur in the United States each year, resulting in 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000

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deaths.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that medical costs and productivity losses due to the seven most prevalent and serious foodborne pathogens range between \$6.5 billion and \$34.9 billion annually. Total costs for all foodborne illnesses are likely to be much higher. In addition, these estimates do not include the total burden placed on society by chronic illnesses caused by foodborne pathogens.<sup>2</sup>



**E. coli poisoning a drag for Finley students**

**Leftovers suspected in death of boy, 10**

By Chris Moran and Karen Kucher STAFF WRITERS

SAN YSIDRO — The illness that left Cesar Castillo's death by contaminated cake at a potluck

**More getting sick from school food**

By ANDREW MOLLISON IN WASHINGTON amollison@wsj.com

that the rate of reported outbreak food poisoning in schools doubled

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

HEALTH

**Food Poisonings at U.S. Schools Rise by 10%**

WASHINGTON—Food poisonings in the nation's schools are increasing at a rate of 10% a year, according to a congressional study.

In 1990, the latest year for which

data are available, 1,100 foodborne illnesses were reported in schools. By 1994, the number had risen to 1,210.

The Agriculture Department subsidizes school lunches and buys some of the food, while schools are responsible for purchasing the rest. USDA "provides little guidance" to those agencies to en-

Making sure that your school is food-safe by following the recommendations outlined in the Food-Safe Schools Action Guide can help ensure that students and staff don't become casualties of foodborne illness. This booklet summarizes what you can do to get started on your way to becoming a food-safe school.

<sup>1</sup> Mead, P.S. et al. Food-related illness and death in the United States. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 1999; 5(5). Available from: [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eit/vol5no5/mead.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eit/vol5no5/mead.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Food and Drug Administration et al. *Food Safety From Farm to Table: A National Food Safety Initiative*, Report to the President. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office; 1997.

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**SIMPLE STEPS SAVE LIVES!**

Did you know that illnesses due to infectious disease cause an estimated tens of millions of lost school days each year in grades K-12? \* Imagine the impact on your school.

**TO REDUCE YOUR SCHOOL'S RISK OF FOODBORNE ILLNESS:**

1. **Clean** hands and food preparation surfaces often.
2. **Separate** foods during preparation to prevent cross-contamination.
3. **Cook** foods to the appropriate temperatures and keep hot foods hot until they are eaten.
4. **Chill** foods quickly to safe temperatures, and keep cold foods cold until they are eaten.



According to CDC, just one of these measures—clean hands—is the single most important factor in preventing the spread of infectious diseases, including foodborne illness.

*\* Vital and Health Statistics, Current Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, 1995, published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Health Statistics, 1998.*

## WHAT IS A FOOD-SAFE SCHOOL?

Quite simply, a food-safe school takes the steps to minimize the risk of foodborne illness throughout the school's environment and has procedures in place to identify and manage outbreaks if they occur.

The Food-Safe Schools Action Guide was developed to help schools become food-safe by providing recommendations and resources for key staff, students, and community members on what they each can do to prevent foodborne illness. Individual schools will be at different stages along the road to becoming food-safe and may not be able to implement all of the recommendations in the Action Guide right away. But there are steps that every school can—and should—take promptly.



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**ELEMENTS OF A FOOD-SAFE SCHOOL**

A food-safe school will:

- \* Promote food safety throughout the school's environment through policies, procedures, and programs
- \* Assess school food safety practices on a regular basis
- \* Provide initial and ongoing food safety training to foodservice and health services staff, teachers, and students as appropriate
- \* Promote a school-wide approach to preventing foodborne illness that ensures that food is as safe as possible in all places where it is stored, prepared, served, or consumed
- \* Provide a physical environment that encourages proper food safety and handwashing behaviors for students and staff
- \* Educate students, staff, and families about food safety and encourage them to model appropriate behavior
- \* Promote collaboration among staff, parents, and other school community members on handwashing and food safety
- \* Monitor, detect, and respond appropriately to foodborne illness in school
- \* Have a foodborne illness outbreak response plan

## WHAT IS THE FOOD-SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION GUIDE?

The Food-Safe Schools Action Guide, along with a wealth of information and resources at [www.FoodSafeSchools.org](http://www.FoodSafeSchools.org), provides a one-stop resource for preventing foodborne illness. Brought to you by CDC and its partners in the National Coalition for Food-Safe Schools, the Action Guide can help schools identify gaps in food safety and develop an action plan for becoming food-safe. It includes individual critical recommendations on what key school staff and community members can do to prevent foodborne illness. Recognizing that school staff often have little discretionary time to devote to searching for new resources and materials, the Action Guide also contains useful tips and resources to help them prioritize recommendations and take action.

THROUGHOUT THE ACTION GUIDE, YOU'LL SEE THESE KEY PRINCIPLES CONVEYED:

**\*NOT JUST IN THE CAFETERIA!** ENSURE FOOD SAFETY IN ALL AREAS OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT. FOOD SAFETY STARTS AT THE CAFETERIA, AND IT DOESN'T END THERE.

**\*EVERYONE HAS A ROLE!** ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION AMONG MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL STAFF, STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES, LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS, COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AGENCIES, AND OTHERS.

**\*EVERY SCHOOL IS DIFFERENT!** TAILOR THE ACTION GUIDE RECOMMENDATIONS TO FIT THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF YOUR SCHOOL.

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### What You'll Find

The Food-Safe Schools Action Guide is a multifaceted implementation tool comprised of a variety of products specially designed to help your staff in their efforts to make the school food-safe. Action Guide materials were developed in a variety of user-friendly formats, including an Action Guide Kit and accompanying CD-ROM distributed to schools. All of the Action Guide Kit materials—plus a wealth of additional information and resources to help staff implement specific parts of the Guide's recommendations—are also available for download at [www.FoodSafeSchools.org](http://www.FoodSafeSchools.org).

The Action Guide Kit and online materials include:



- \* A short **VIDEO** demonstrating how one school team used the Action Guide to help them become a food-safe school.
- \* A motivational **POWERPOINT® PRESENTATION** designed to help your team make a persuasive argument on the importance of food safety.
- \* An **ADMINISTRATOR'S BRIEFING** using real-life examples of school foodborne outbreaks to highlight the costs of not being food-safe.

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- \* A **NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING GUIDE** that your team can use to identify current school food safety policies and practices, find gaps, and develop a prioritized action plan for becoming food-safe.
- \* **ACTION SHEETS** with customized recommendations for members of the school community to help them understand their unique role in ensuring school food safety.
- \* **USEFUL RESOURCES** to help you manage food allergies, protect your school from potential food biosecurity breaches, and develop food safety lesson plans that are integrated with the National Health Education Standards.

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The Action Guide also features **SPECIAL IN-DEPTH MODULES** including the following:

- \* Building a Food-Safe School Team
- \* Food Safety 101
- \* Food Biosecurity
- \* Managing Food Allergies
- \* Ensuring School Handwashing
- \* Ensuring Food-Safe Eating Environments School-wide
- \* Foodborne Illness Outbreak Detection
- \* Foodborne Illness Outbreak Response
- \* Food Safety A to Z Reference Guide
- \* Prevention, Detection, and Management of Foodborne Illness: A Handbook for School Nurses
- \* Developing Food-Safe School Policies
- \* Sample Food Safety Lesson Plans and Activities
- \* Many other food safety educational materials in print-ready format

## WHO HAS A ROLE IN CREATING A FOOD-SAFE SCHOOL?

No one person can ensure that the school is food-safe. Everyone interested in the health and safety of students has an important role. For example, school food producers, suppliers and distributors need to ensure that all food that arrives at school is safe. However, some key school community members need to assume special roles. The Food-Safe Schools Action Guide has Action Sheets and in-depth modules for each of these key players:

- school administrators
- the food-safe school team leader
- school foodservice staff
- school nurses
- teachers
- families and students
- local health department staff
- the local cooperative extension



The Action Sheets highlight the role of each person in preventing foodborne illness and provide critical recommendations that are tied to the Food-Safe School Needs Assessment and Planning Guide. The special in-depth modules were designed to supplement the

Action Sheets to provide more detailed information and resources to consider when implementing the Guide's recommendations.

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Here's a small sampling of the many things each person can do to help ensure a food-safe school.

**SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CAN:**

- Provide support and approval for implementing a food-safe school program
- Develop and/or implement policies, protocols, and procedures for school staff to ensure a food-safe school eating environment

- Make food safety a priority in schools to protect students, staff, and the school from foodborne illness outbreaks

## THE FOOD-SAFE SCHOOL TEAM LEADER CAN:



- Unite team efforts to assess and strengthen current school food safety practices
- Explore and organize new food safety activities
- Follow up with food-safe school team members to ensure that improvement efforts are carried out
- Rally support for food safety efforts

## FOODSERVICE STAFF CAN:



- Take steps to prevent foodborne illness outbreaks from originating in the foodservice area to reduce the risk of students and staff becoming seriously—or even fatally—ill with a foodborne illness
- Provide leadership and educate others in the school—such as teachers who prepare foods in the classroom—to practice proper food safety practices
- Develop and follow clear guidelines in the event of a real or suspected foodborne illness outbreak

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### SCHOOL NURSES CAN:



- Promote essential prevention strategies such as handwashing
- Play a key role in identifying a potential outbreak
- Collaborate with teachers to develop and incorporate food safety in the health education curriculum

### TEACHERS CAN:



- Provide students with food safety knowledge and skills they can use every day to keep them safe and healthy throughout their lives
- Incorporate food safety concepts into the curriculum, teaching it from historical, economic, cultural, social, scientific, technological, or other perspectives
- Help students better understand decisions and practices that affect their health and empower them to take an active role in preventing foodborne illness
- Send information on safe food practices to the families of students
- Promote and model proper handwashing practices to prevent foodborne illness

## FAMILIES AND STUDENTS CAN:



- Play a key role in food safety because they are ultimately responsible for their child's or adolescent's health, behavior, and care
- Advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of students in school through avenues such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and Parent-Teachers Organization (PTO) and with health care providers
- Model and enforce appropriate food safety practices at home
- Make healthy behavior choices—like handwashing—to ensure food is safe

## LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS CAN:



- Assist schools in developing food safety policies and procedures
  - Be resources for training and information on food safety and foodborne illness
- Conduct routine inspections to ensure schools are food-safe
- Implement outbreak control measures to stop person-to-person transmission, remove any sources of infection (e.g., contaminated food or drink), find out why the outbreak occurred, and prevent outbreaks from reoccurring

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### COOPERATIVE EXTENSION CAN:



- Provide food safety curricula and materials to schools
  - Be knowledgeable about current food safety practices and participate in trainings for school staff
- Provide recognition for and publicize food safety activities of schools
- Join or advise Food-Safe School Teams

## READY TO GET STARTED?

Follow these simple steps to **TAKE ACTION** now:

1. Familiarize yourself with the information in the Food-Safe Schools Action Guide and Web site, [www.FoodSafeSchools.org](http://www.FoodSafeSchools.org)
2. Brief your school administrator on the importance of creating a food-safe school
3. Assemble a Food-Safe School Team and identify a leader
4. Identify your school's current food safety policies and practices
5. Assess strengths and weaknesses using the Needs Assessment and Planning Guide
6. Develop a plan for improvement
7. Take action!



## THE REVIEWS ARE IN

### WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT THE FOOD-SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION GUIDE:

*“If only every other aspect of the school health program had such a thorough and practical resource document available... Reading [the Action Guide] has been educational.”*

Jim Bogden, National Association of State Boards of Education

*“Comprehensive and well-organized.”*

Elizabeth Bugden, Kids First/RI Healthy Schools! Healthy Kids!

*“You have taken a massive task and broken it into very manageable and practical units.... I commend you for the effort and great accomplishment. ...an exemplary job!”*

Dr. Jean Harris, Government/School Relations, Pierre Foods, Inc.

*“The document is excellent and will be a valuable reference.”*

Mary Anne Hogue, MS, RD, LDN, FADA, CFSP, American Dietetic Association

*“A well-organized, well-written, user-friendly, valuable resource.”*

Scottie Ford, West Virginia Department of Education

*“Wonderful and very applicable to school food-service... Wow! This is awesome! What a great tool.”*

Erik Peterson, School Nutrition Association (formerly ASFSA)

THE FOOD-SAFE SCHOOLS  
**ACTION  
GUIDE**

Find it at

***www.FoodSafeSchools.org***

THE ONE-STOP RESOURCE FOR PREVENTING  
FOODBORNE ILLNESS OUTBREAKS

